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Guruprakash J [*] and Krithika L.B

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Guruprakash J [1],* and Krithika L.B [2]

[1] Department of Computer Science and Engineering, Amrita School of Computing, Coimbatore, Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, India

[2] School of Computer Science Engineering and Information Systems, Vellore Institute of Technology, Vellore, India; krithika.lb@vit.ac.in

* Correspondence: j_guruprakash@cb.amrita.edu

Abstract: Loneliness is becoming prevalent across Japan in spite of its a dense population and communal culture. Surveys show 40% of adults report isolation across demographics. The contradiction emerges due to deteriorating social structure with modernization, economic parity, urbanization, and fading conventional setup. The continually social withdrawals, called "hikikomori." Relief seekers have embraced AI based emotive robots, digital avatars, and immersive VR as low-stakes social surrogates despite limited capacity to cultivate human intimacy. To stabilise government attempts awareness through reforms, scheme and support services. But a concrete transformation can be brough in with work-life balance, gender equality and rewire the metrics for self-esteem. Even a perfectly personalized AI cannot replace the human affection lacking in the society. Lasting solutions demand technological aids be balanced by confronting and reinventing community purpose and bring in structural change. Overall Japan's endemic isolation reveals the societal fraying when modernization privileges independence over interdependence. The path forward rests on restoring cultural foundations to reverse loneliness and social isolation.

I. Introduction

Loneliness is a wide spreading societal condition in Japan, striking significant portions of the population across demographics. According to a 2018 survey, 55.6% of Japanese respondents reported feeling lonely even before the COVID-19 pandemic [1]. This is despite Japan's cultural reputation as a collectivist society emphasizing group harmony and shared responsibility [2]. Japan consistently ranks as one of the loneliest countries globally across various indexes like the Legatum Prosperity Index [3]. For a nation built on togetherness the loneliness and isolation is a contradiction , with some of the world's most densely populated urban centres like Tokyo and Osaka, suffers from prevalent feelings of isolation and lack of social bonding and personal connections [4]. While the pandemic undoubtedly aggravated issues of loneliness, the roots run much deeper into systemic issues in Japanese society and culture [5]. From economic instability and work pressures to decay of traditional family structures, various factors have converged to make loneliness a public health crisis in Japan [6]. While the data shows high loneliness, the reasons behind this epidemic in a supposedly tightly-knit country need exploring.

II. Reasons for High Loneliness

Several intertwined social, economic, and cultural factors underpin the high levels of loneliness in Japan. Excessive work demands and pressures make it difficult to achieve work-life balance for many Japanese employees [7]. Long working days, unpaid overtime, and expectation to put company loyalty over personal life leave little time to nurture social connections outside of colleagues [8]. Such work devotion derives from cultural norms about self-identity coming from workplace status. Economic instability and financial pressures also contribute to loneliness. For example, the 1990s collapse of the economic bubble left many unemployed, underemployed, or feeling status loss if they held onto jobs with reduced pay/authority [9]. Men especially tied self-worth to being breadwinners, so such failure brought shame and withdrawal [10]. Urbanization and mobility have eroded the traditional multigenerational household model [11]. Adult children move for work and aging parents

live separately. Natural disasters like 1995's Great Hanshin earthquake exacerbated displacement [12]. With fewer family ties, elderly isolation and incidents of kodokushi (lonely deaths) have climbed.

"Hikikomori" refers to acute social isolation where people, 80% men, confine themselves from society for months or years [13]. While first noted in the 1990s, numbers rose after the Global Financial Crisis [14]. Their withdrawal from work/school and reliance on parents for basic needs represent one extreme of loneliness [15]. The origins reveal systemic issues, but quantifying the problem is key for motivating change.

III. Quantifying Loneliness

While loneliness is a complex phenomenon to measure, various surveys, indexes, and economic indicators shed light on its prevalence in Japan.

A 2018 survey by Kaspersky found 55.6% of Japanese respondents felt lonely even before the pandemic [1]. The country consistently ranks low on social connectedness in indexes like the Legatum Prosperity Index [3]. In Legatum's social capital index measuring strength of personal relationships, Japan ranked 143rd out of 167 countries [3]. The OECD Better Life Index also puts Japan below average in community engagement and work-life balance [16]. In a 2022 public health study, 40.3% of Japanese adults reported feeling lonely, up 3.9% from the previous year [17].

Indirect Indicators - In addition to direct survey data, indirect economic indicators reflect the extent of isolation and challenging social dynamics:

- Single-Person Households: Estimated to rise from 18.4% in 2015 to 40% by 2040 [18].
- Long Work Hours: Japanese employees work some of the longest hours among industrialized countries [19].
- Technology Use: Widespread adoption of robotic pets, AI companions, and virtual reality as substitutes for human interaction [20].

This multidimensional data conveys the scope of loneliness across demographics in Japan. Tackling the issue requires recognizing its roots in systemic social and economic forces. Faced with rising loneliness, the government has attempted some responses, though their efficacy is doubtful.

IV. Government Efforts to Address the Issue

Recognizing loneliness as a growing public health crisis, the Japanese government has taken some initial steps to tackle the issue.

In 2021, former Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga appointed 71-year-old Tetsushi Sakamoto as the nation's first "Minister of Loneliness" to address rising suicide rates and social isolation [21]. However, the role lasted less than a year before PM transition. Current PM Fumio Kishida established a new task force in late 2021 to focus on loneliness and isolation. Efforts include around-the-clock hotlines, partnerships with NGOs/private sector for community outreach, and permanent expansion of previous telephone consultation pilots [22]. While symbolic appointments and support services show government acknowledgment, critics argue systemic solutions are needed to fix cultural roots. Fragmented initiatives risk leaving the most isolated untouched and may provide only superficial relief [23].

Sustainable change requires understanding and reforming elements like youth pressure, economic insecurity, and outdated social norms that feed the loneliness loop. Cultural and historical analysis reveals the true roots of present-day isolation.

V. Root Causes of Loneliness

While recent events and policies have influenced loneliness levels, experts trace the origins to systemic societal issues rooted in culture and history.

Economic instability has markedly shaped Japanese social relations. The 1990s collapse of the bubble economy caused widespread unemployment and underemployment. An entire "lost generation" faced permanent income loss and lack of job stability [24]. Culturally, jobs confer status and self-identity. Losing work brought shame and social withdrawal for many men in particular who

tied masculinity to being breadwinners [25]. Even today's youth face daunting job searches, as companies remain risk-averse about hiring full-time entry level positions after the bubble burst [26]. Intense competition carries heavy psychic tolls that inhibit social bonding. Disasters like the 1995 Kobe earthquake exacerbated housing issues and family displacement [27]. Urbanization has also eroded traditional multigenerational living, with youth mobility separating parents and grandparents geographically [28]. These trends catalysed elderly isolation.

The loneliness crisis thus emerges from generations of precarious economic structures and fading social support systems. Seeking remedy, many turn to advanced technology despite its narrow capabilities.

VI. Technology as a Solution or Problem

Japan has enthusiastically adopted technologies like robots, VR, and AI as remedies for loneliness. However, over-reliance on tech like AI based companions , virtual connections and Technology addiction instead of human connections poses societal risks.

From robotic pets like Aibo to humanoid Pepper, lifelike AI companions aim to fulfil emotional needs. VR creates immersive fantasy worlds for escapism. While helping some seniors, tech may enable withdrawal [29]. Studies suggest social robots elicit empathy, but over-dependence on artificial bonds risks eroding ability for real intimacy [30]. The VR space offers recreation but no actual human touch. As pandemic restrictions recede, device fixation spells further disconnection. Youth accustomed to smartphones and indie pastimes show greater affinity for technology over in-person socializing [31]. But failing to develop real relationships risks nurturing maladaptive behaviours. Heavy device use even rewires children's brains for isolation [32].

While tech promises temporary relief for lonely individuals, it cannot cultivate the nuance, affection, and understanding unique to human relationships. Over-reliance may thus enable avoidance of complex solutions. Researchers propose technology aids, but structural change is the real solution.

VII. Proposed AI and Technology Solutions

However, the solutions in Table 1 these aids are a relief factor these cannot fix or undo generations of societal dysfunction.

Table 1. AI based solution for overcoming social isolation.

Reference	Solution	Theme	Pros	Cons
[33]	Social robots for older adults: Framework of barriers to adoption	Robot companions for elderly	Provide comfort; Elicit empathy	Expensive; Require learning new tech skills; Over-reliance risks
[34]	A chatbot system as mental health intervention for loneliness	Chatbots for mental health support	Convenient 24/7 access; Anonymity reduces stigma	No human warmth; Poor substitutes for therapy
[35]	Virtual Reality to Address Loneliness in Older Adults: Systematic Review	VR for elderly escapism	Engaging cognitive stimulation; Safe adventures	Isolation Enablement; Cost barriers

[36]	AI Companion for Combating Loneliness and Social Isolation for the Elderly	Custom AI avatars	Personalized advice and affection	Glitches erode trust; No physical assist benefits
[37]	A Friendly Robot Companion to Combat Loneliness in Older Adults	Robotic pet companions	Safe affinity for vulnerable groups	Overly simplistic interactions long-term
[38]	The Potential of Digital Companions to Reduce Loneliness in Japan: A Survey Study	Digital avatar companions	Easy adoption for tech-savvy; Low-stakes	Difficult to truly relate to non-humans; Glitches erode trust
[39]	Using Online Support Groups to Combat Loneliness in the Elderly	Online peer support groups	Share coping strategies; Expert webinars	Lack in-person intimacy; Can be overwhelming
[40]	Banking on AI to Tackle Loneliness and Social Isolation in the Elderly	AI for personalized activity planning	Increases motivation for socializing	Privacy concerns around data collection; No coaching component

VIII. Limitations and Need for Broader Support

While AI and technology can patch some holes in the loneliness crisis, sustainable solutions call for cultural shifts in values and economic reforms.

Robots, chatbots, and VR may temporarily simulate companionship missing in people's lives. But surface-level tech cannot replicate human intimacy and understanding [41]. Once the novelty fades, an empty feeling remains. The loneliness epidemic emerged from dysfunctional social norms around work, gender roles, and collective duties [42]. Rectifying the problem requires fundamental changes in these cultural realms to promote balance, flexibility and inclusiveness. Without addressing flaws woven into societal structures, Band-Aid tech fixes risk enabling the intergenerational continuity of loneliness [43]. Each generation faces squeeze from outdated systems, finds stopgap relief in technology, and nothing structurally transforms. Breaking this loop necessitates wide lens.

True solutions come from compassion and willingness to reshape systems that bred the loneliness scourge to begin with. No bot can replace that human responsibility.

Some solution with AI that provided aid and support structure for Mental Health [44] , Alzheimer's [45], Health Care System with special reference to Mental Health [46] and Assistive Technology for Elders [47].

IX. Conclusion

Loneliness has developed into a public health crisis in Japan, worsened by economic and dysfunctional societal have isolated people across generations. While technology offers hope for temporary relief, it cannot truly replicate human intimacy and connection. The statistics and data presented in this paper quantify the prevalence of loneliness across demographics in Japan.

Contributed by various factors, outdated social norms , decayed traditional support systems and collective purpose. The result is lonely and disconnected population seeking solace in AI and robots. However, over-reliance on technology enables avoidance of sustainable solutions. These temporary relief would perpetuate rather than confront loneliness. Stopping this vicious cycle requires fundamental changes and economic inclusiveness. There are no quick fixes to repair decades of policies that has fractured the society. But collective small steps towards awareness and community building can help. All of these cannot happen without government investments and support. These approach of inclusion and restricting combined with AI aid can overtime help reduce people suffering from loneliness.

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